

Organized crime, such as illicit activities carried out by drug cartels and human trafficking networks, flourishes in the context of failed public security. Transnational criminal networks threaten people's safety and lives by carrying out targeted executions, trafficking and enslaving humans, and smuggling small arms across borders. Although they often feature a higher degree of organization and permanence than urban gangs or militias, this type of crime may have less severe human security impacts (as measured by civilian casualties) than open armed conflict and endemic community violence in urban areas.

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A final type of urban violence worthy of mention is **anomic crime** — crime committed by individual actors unaffiliated with an organized group on a random, ad hoc basis. Although this type of crime can be found in virtually all cities, its relatively small overall impact and unorganized nature do not render it a significant threat to human security.

Providing human security in an era of urbanization

Cities predated modern states and were one of the first forms of government capable of protecting people from outside threats. They were the first sites of a conscious social bargain through which some individual freedoms were exchanged for a set of common rights and responsibilities maintained by civic authorities.

Most security issues were local issues. Walls protected the city from external attack from local and regional enemies, and the city itself provided public security for people within its walls. These were among the first forms of collective public security — cities that protected people within a defined urban space.

Today's cities protect people not with walls but with effective public security forces capable of maintaining the rule of law. Cities also feature unique characteristics that have the potential to make them resilient to conflict. Effective, inclusive and responsive governance at the local level can play a key role in preventing and mitigating violent conflict by easing tensions between groups before they erupt into violence, and by ensuring that minority views are represented. The proximity of local leaders to the community can allow them to be more responsive to the needs of their constituents, while

engaging civil society actors in participatory, transparent decision-making processes can empower people and build trust.

Well-managed cities can take advantage of the built environment and population density to promote conflict resilience. Frequent interaction and inter-group dialogue among urban residents can build positive social capital — the networks between people and groups that build trust and social cohesion. With sufficient resources, effective leadership, and a degree of autonomy, municipal governments can take advantage of institutions and processes designed to build inter-group trust. These are the foundations of conflict-resilient cities.

Cities have both a role to play in improving human security and the potential to provide it. They are therefore logical entry points for policy interventions that seek to enhance public security and build peace. Building strong, peaceful cities — or “city-building” — will be a valuable goal in the “Urban Century.” Focusing on cities can improve state capacity, strengthen state legitimacy, and instil the practice of peaceful resolution of conflict from the ground up. If it is true that “a country's global success rests on local shoulders,”¹⁹ ensuring that people at the local level enjoy freedom from fear is an important first step toward improving human security.